



# VIRGINIA

**COVID-19 Update November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

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A team of RAND researchers was asked by the Commonwealth of Virginia to review available information on COVID-19 models of the commonwealth to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each model and their relevance to decisionmaking. The work of the research team will be documented in a forthcoming RAND research report. The information in this presentation is intended to keep policymakers abreast of the latest findings of the research team.

This research was sponsored by the Commonwealth of Virginia and conducted by the RAND Corporation. RAND is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. For more information, visit [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org).



# Bottom-Line Up Front



## Virginia's total case levels rose substantially

- Counties in the southwest still have the highest case loads but the growth is widespread
- Hospitalizations also continued to rise and are likely to spike in the next few weeks
- Testing levels remain relatively high



## Additional triggers could lead to a rapid rise in the coming months

- Seasonal changes
- Holiday interactions
- COVID-fatigue

**Cheaper, faster testing or a vaccine could reduce the spread if widely deployed**

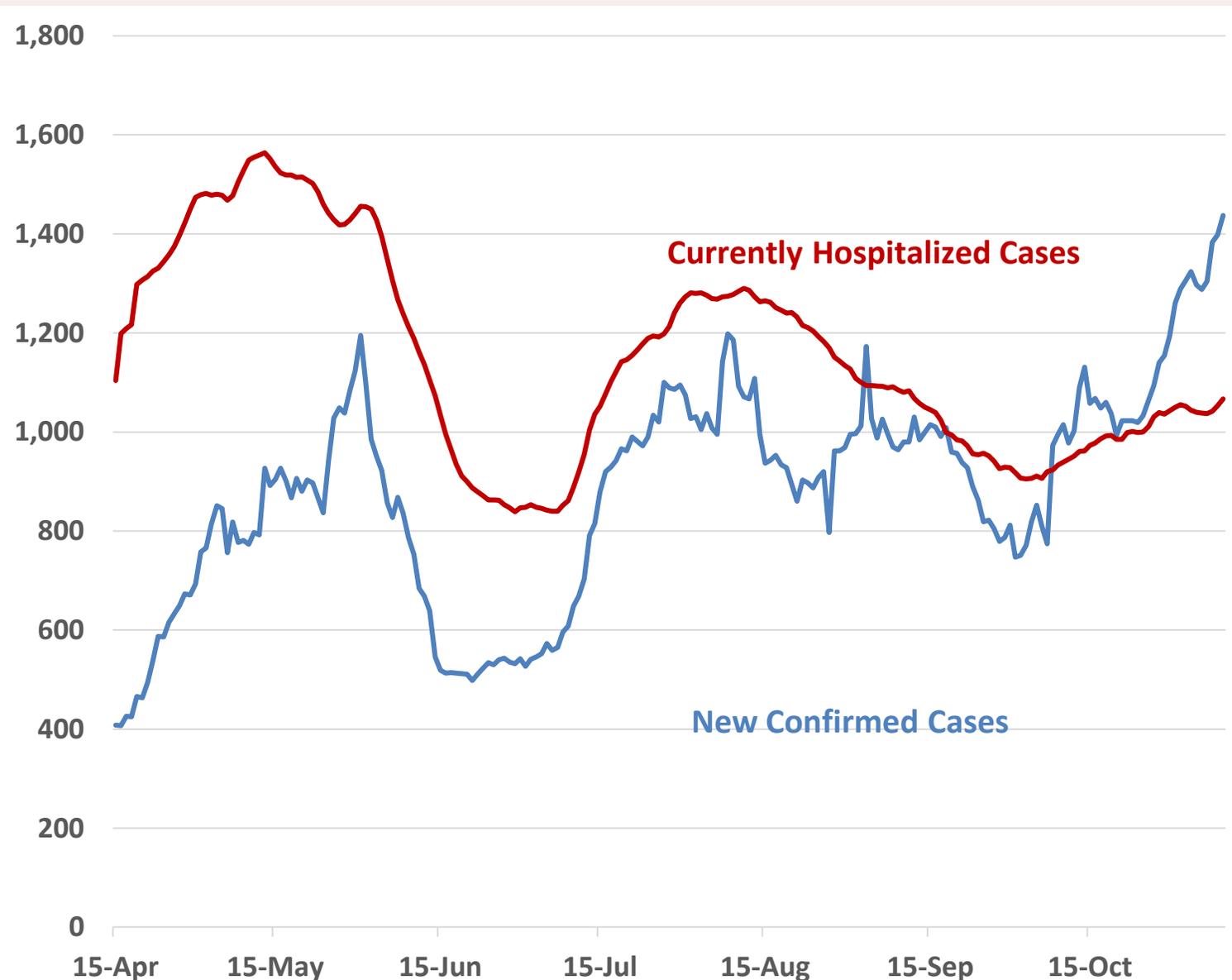


## Modeling is less useful for forecasting because behavioral responses are driving current trends

- Models will continue to be very useful for comparing policies and exploring scenarios



# Cases spiked last week



**New confirmed cases spiked and have surpassed 1,400/day on average**

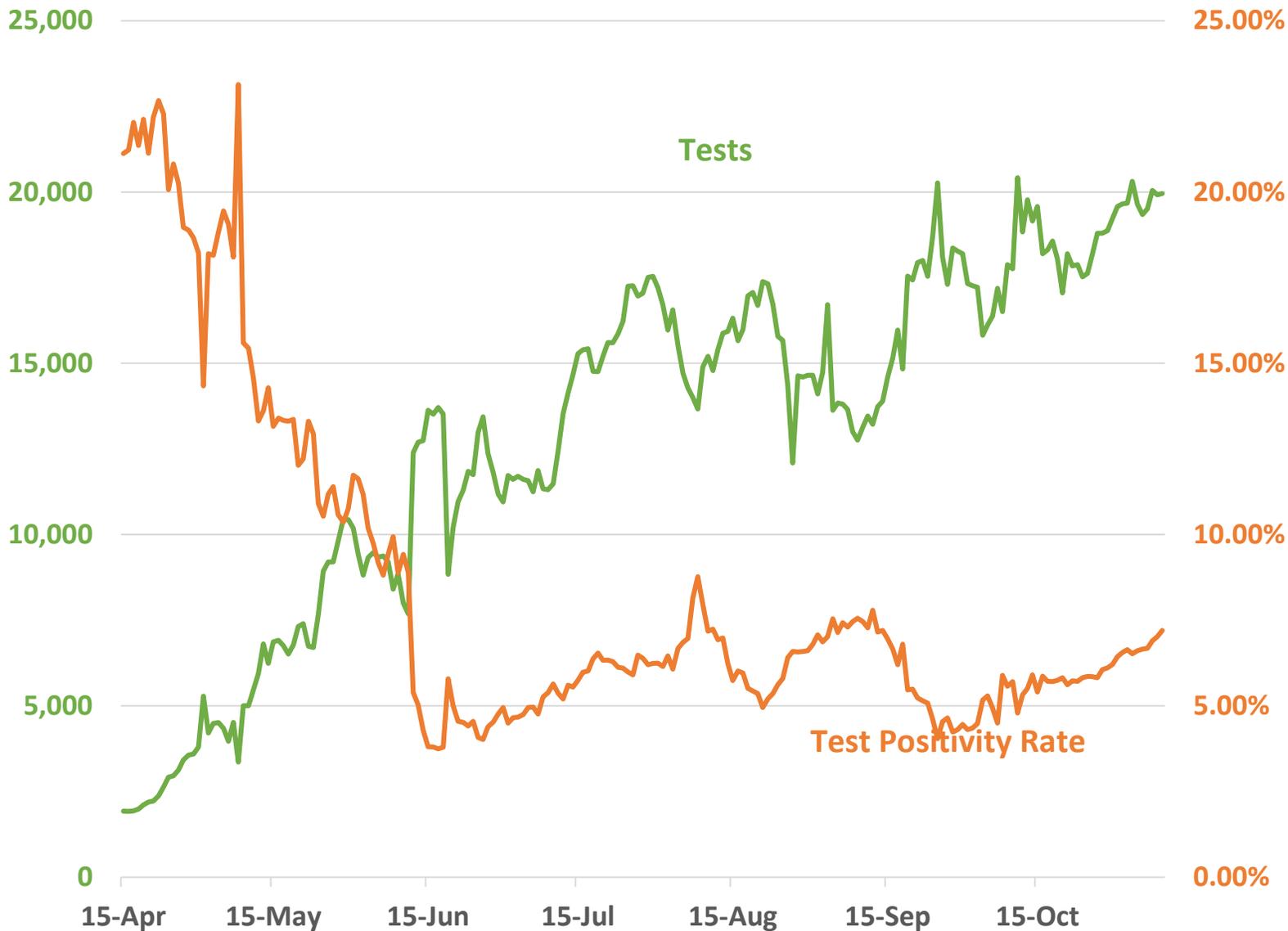
- The maximum for the second wave did not surpass 1,200/day
- This current wave is likely to be significantly worse than the summer

**Currently hospitalized cases have moved over 1,200**

- This is a lagging indicator
- Hospitalizations are likely to increase by a similar magnitude to the case rate (20-30%) in the next week or two



# Testing levels are at the target range for a test-and-trace strategy



## 25.00% Tests per day are roughly 20,000

- Testing levels are appropriate for a test-and-trace strategy
- Further reopening is estimated to require four to five times more testing along with lower case rates (See Rockefeller Foundation)

## The test positivity rate has increased to 7.2 percent

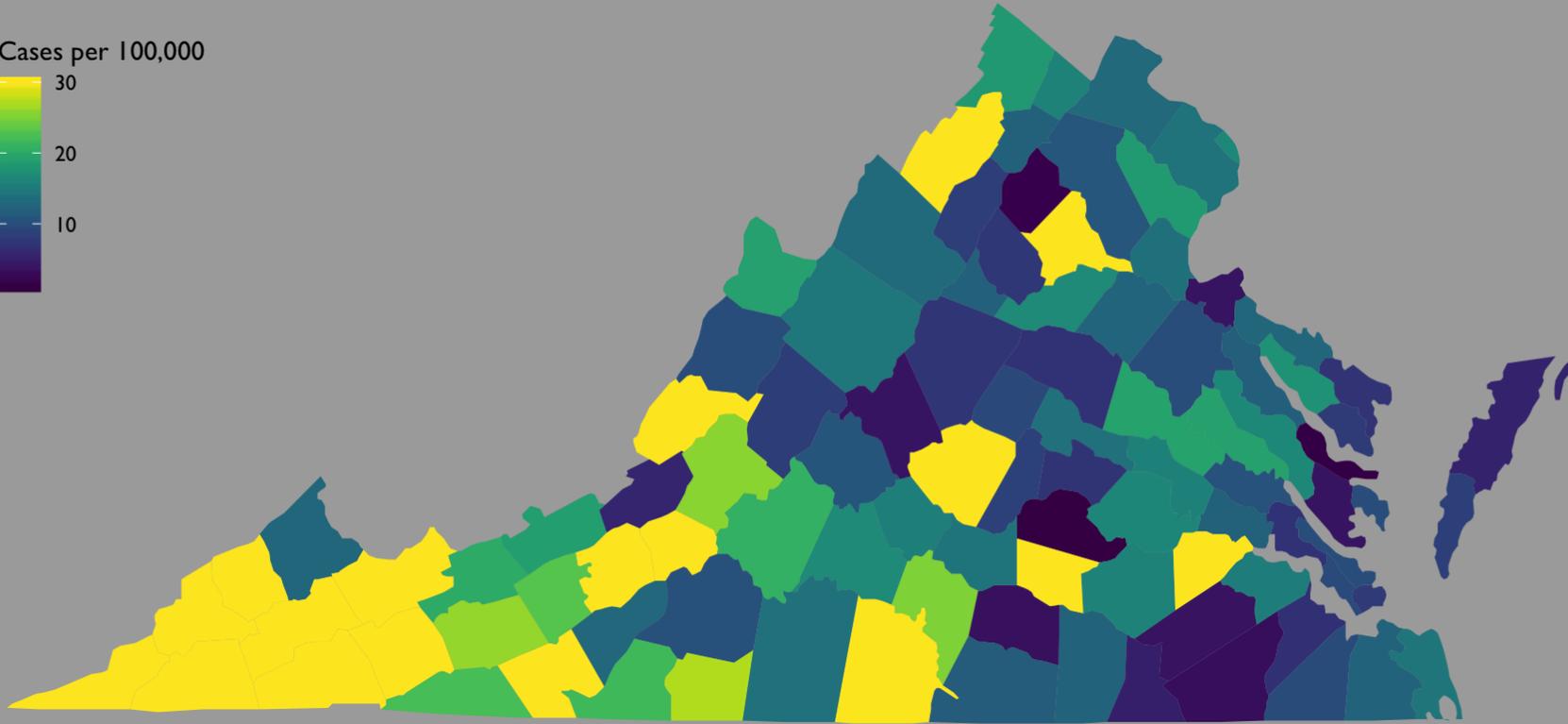
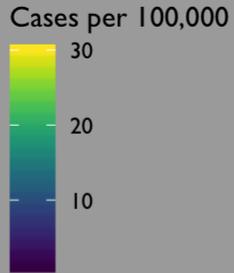
- Five percent is a suggested target
- Case rates increased faster than the tests leading to this rise



# Case rates have continued to grow statewide

## CASE COUNT

Source: VDH



**Yellow** indicates at least **30 cases per 100,000**

- The previous scale was capped at 20 cases per 100k

**Virginia's Southwest Region counties continue to see the highest case levels**

- Counties across the Commonwealth saw increases

These data were updated November 10<sup>th</sup> and represent a seven-day average of the previous week

# Case rate trends in neighboring states have grown

Over the last 7 days, Virginia had 17.2 (+12% from last week) new confirmed cases per day per 100,000

## Very high case loads (>20):

- Tennessee (49.8 new cases per 100k, +57% from last week)
- Kentucky (42.4, Kentucky +12%)
- West Virginia (29.7, +24%)
- North Carolina (25.6, +64%)
- Maryland (21.1, +46%)

## High case loads (10-20):

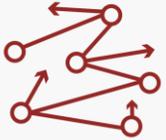
- District of Columbia (13.1, +3%)

Lower case loads (<10): None

These data were updated November 12<sup>th</sup> and represent a seven-day average of the previous week



# We've been monitoring recent, relevant literature



## **Chang et al. used a model with mobility data to explain inequalities in spread and explore reopening options**

- They used hourly movement data from 98 million Americans with cell phones in 10 U.S. cities to identify “super-spreader” points of interest (POIs) such as restaurants and religious establishments
- Racial and socioeconomic disparities can be explained in large part by density differences within POIs
- The highest risk POIs vary by city but typically include full-service restaurants, gyms, hotels, cafes, religious organizations, and limited-service restaurants
- Tailored reductions to maximum occupancy may be effective



## **Roux et al. considered the implications of state variation in seasonal flu vaccination for a COVID-19 vaccine**

- At 59%, Virginia had the 4<sup>th</sup> highest vaccination rate in the 2019-2020 season
- More than 70% of children and seniors are vaccinated but only 51% of other adults are
- These vaccination rates are roughly the minimum required for a full return to pre-COVID-19 activities

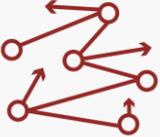


## **Whaley et al. compared claims data from March and April 2020 to the same months in 2019 to assess telemedicine utilization**

- Analyzing data from 6.8 million privately insured individuals, they found telemedicine visits rose three-fold with significant variation by zip-code
- Zip-codes with an average income >400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) saw almost 50% more telemedicine visits per capita as those <200%,
- Zip-codes that were at least 80% white had 20% more telemedicine visits than mostly nonwhite areas
- Investments may be needed to ensure equitable telemedicine access



# We've been monitoring recent, relevant literature



## **Grijalva et al. looked at the transmission of COVID within households**

- The authors examined the number of household infections stemming from 101 index patients in Tennessee and Wisconsin from April to September
- Overall, 53% of the index patient's household members tested positive and 75% of those tests were within five days of the index case's positive test
- The secondary infection rate when the index patient is under 18 years old was also 53%



## **Hutchins et al. surveyed 2,000+ people to study trends in mitigation behaviors from April to June**

- With the exception of wearing facemasks, people generally complied with fewer mitigation approaches (e.g., frequent handwashing and maintaining six-feet of distance in public) as time passed
- Compliance generally increased with age and the 18- to 29-year-old group had the lowest compliance

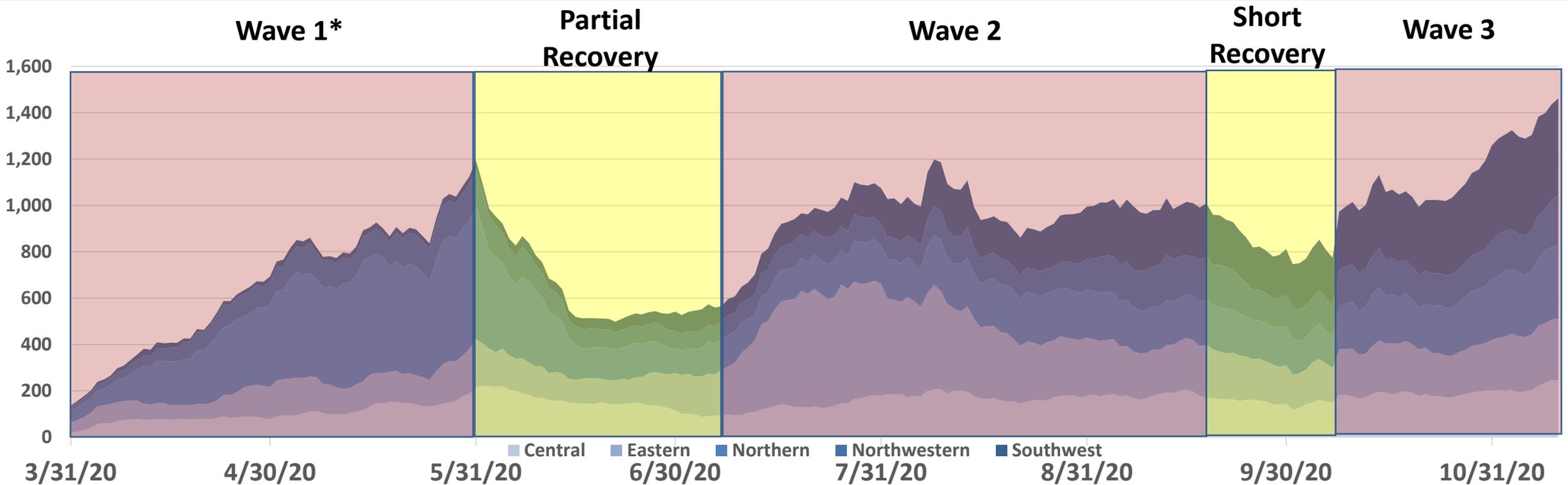


## **Cronin and Evans looked at the relationship between nursing home quality and mortality**

- Quality, as measured by inspection ratings, does not appear to be related to the likelihood that a case occurs among staff or residents
- If there is a case, lower quality facilities have significantly higher COVID deaths than higher quality facilities
- However, excess non-COVID deaths, particularly in areas with low rates of COVID, are higher at the higher quality facilities, which implies that some countermeasures, such as visitation limitations, are having adverse health effects
- The excess deaths are highest among patients with conditions such as Alzheimer's



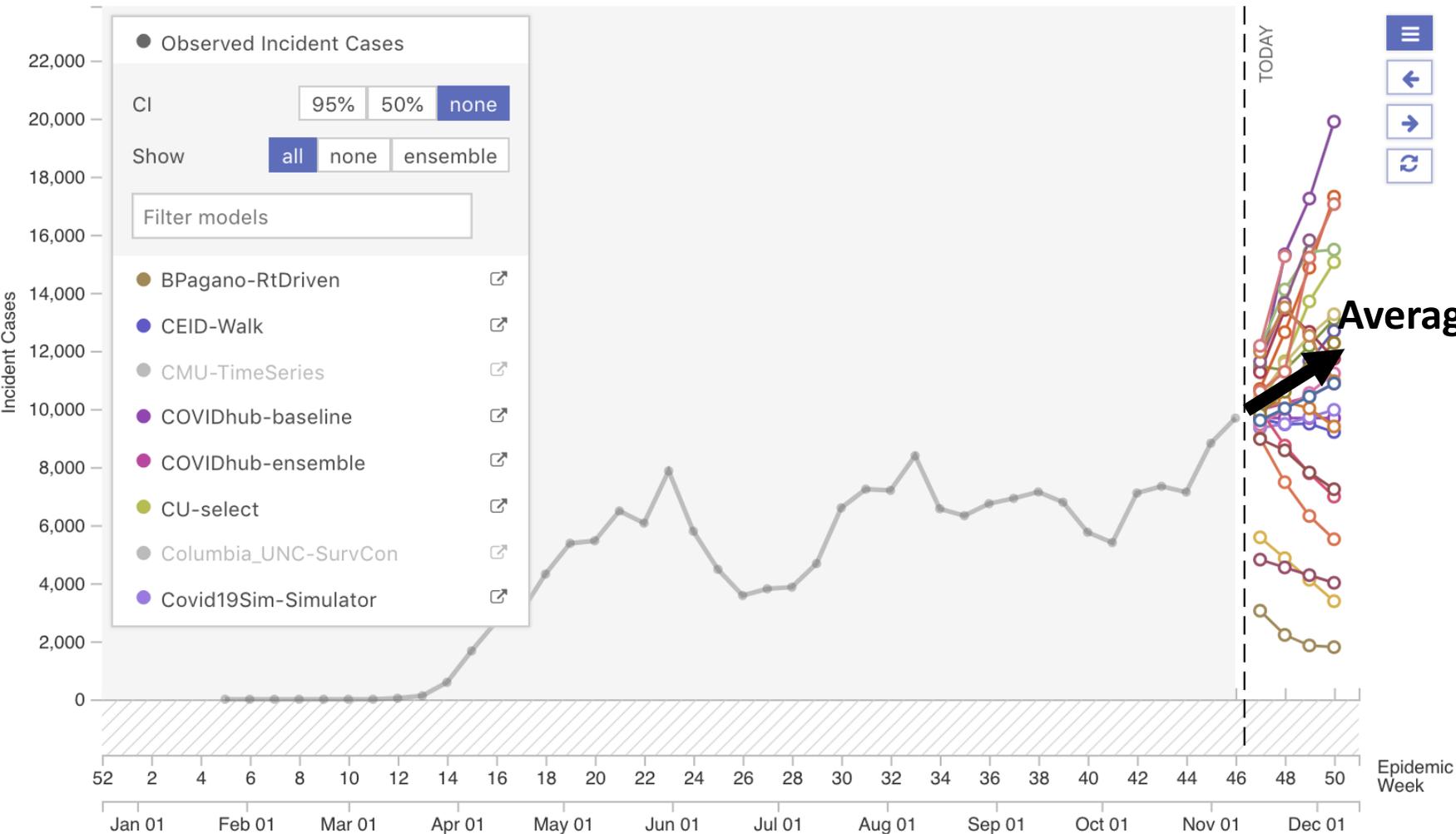
# Each wave of cases has been centered in different parts of the Commonwealth



- The initial wave was concentrated in the Northern region\*
- There was a partial recovery when cases in the Northern region dropped
- In mid-July, cases grew first in the Eastern region and then, beginning in August, statewide
- Statewide levels declined slightly, with a dip in the Eastern region in late September
- A new wave began in the Southwest region at the beginning of October and is spreading across the Commonwealth

\*Testing was insufficient for accurate counts during the first wave

# Forecasts of cases are diverging, but average to continued rise



## There is substantial variation in the case forecasts

- The model “average” is an increase for the coming weeks

## The mechanisms driving the spread at this stage are very different than in the early stage

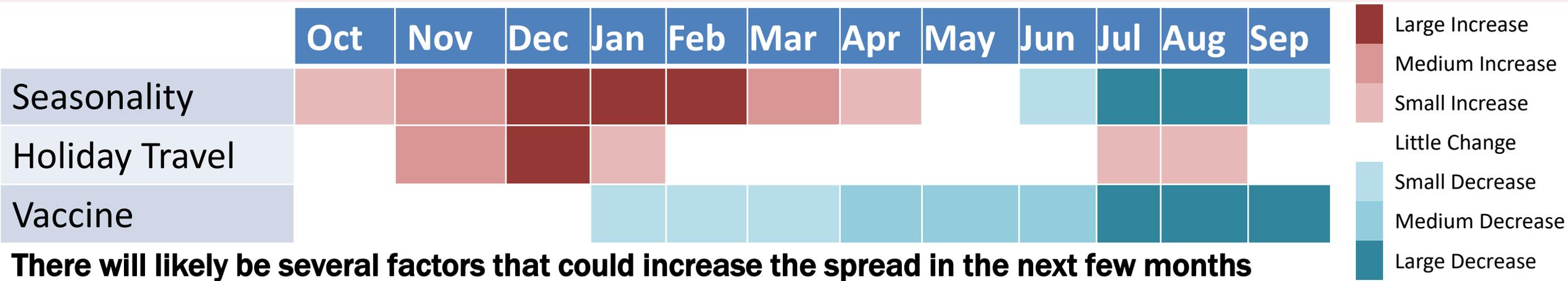
- Initially, people did not change their behavior, so COVID spread exponentially
- Increased tele-work, changing weather, the return of In-person instruction, and other factors changed the pattern of spread
- These new patterns require the models to evolve

**For short-term forecasts, assuming last week’s level is a good estimate**

Source: COVID-19 Forecast Hub, <https://viz.covid19forecasthub.org/>  
Accessed November 10<sup>th</sup>



# There are several triggers that could lead to increased spread



- Seasonal effects for COVID-19 could lead to more spread during the colder months
- Holiday travel could lead to increased spread, particularly from the mixing of age cohorts

## A vaccine may become available around the turn of the year

- It is unlikely that there will be sufficient supply initially to significantly reduce the spread
- The vaccine will not be completely effective and so a large share of the population will need to be inoculated
- People may scale back preventative behaviors (such as distancing and mask wearing) too soon

## There are likely to be long-term repercussions that need planning and preparation to mitigate

- Mental health problems may persist, particularly among medical professionals and those directly affected
- Following the 1918 pandemic, there were higher rates of disability, mental illness, and other conditions



# There are interventions that could be applied to mitigate Thanksgiving spread

## **Research and data indicate that the 18- to 29-year-old population can be a major source of spread**

- Research has found that this population was instrumental in the early spread of COVID in the U.S.
- Studies also indicate that cases in this population peak two- to four-weeks before other age groups during many county-level outbreaks

## **Targeting the 18- to 29-year-old population may be an efficient way to reduce the spread**

- Testing should be greatly expanded for this population prior to Thanksgiving
- Colleges and universities with elevated case levels should consider remaining open during Thanksgiving for students that have been exposed to COVID to reduce spread off-campus

## **There are also broader policy responses that could be applied**

- Mandatory testing at airports and other transit points could reduce the spread from out-of-state travelers
- A shutdown of at least two weeks paired with expanded testing in mid-November could reduce levels prior to Thanksgiving
- Alternatively, targeted shutdowns may be useful and more widely accepted
- A short shutdown may be a useful mitigation after Thanksgiving to contain spread prior to the December holidays



# Discussion and Questions